

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
TESTIMONY TO GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE
CLIMATE HEARING
September 21, 2006

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Waxman and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to submit a brief statement to your Committee as you explore the vitally important topic of climate change technology research. I am pleased to see your Committee taking time to review a topic so essential to the future of our nation, and indeed of the entire world.

Since climate change technology research is in the jurisdiction of the Science Committee, and since we have had numerous hearings in this area – including a hearing just yesterday that included some of the witnesses before you today – I thought it might be helpful to very briefly lay out some thoughts on issues that may be raised at your hearing.

Specifically, I want to provide some comments on the Strategic Plan for the Climate Change Technology Plan (CCTP), the final version of which was released at our hearing yesterday, and on proposals to create an agency modeled on the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to focus on energy research.

Our view of the Strategic Plan is that it is well done as far as it goes, but that that isn't nearly far enough. The Plan provides a thoughtful and comprehensive review of existing programs and of possible directions for the future. But it does not provide much of the guidance one would expect from a Strategic Plan.

As many outside commenters have noted, the plan does not establish clear priorities or a method for doing so. It does not provide clear criteria for determining which programs to fund, when to fund them, or how much funding to provide. It does

not clearly connect specific programs with any particular policy goal, such as the Administration's (rather minimal) goal of reducing greenhouse gas intensity. Given that the Plan is about three years late, these failings are particularly unfortunate.

The Plan also explicitly fails to deal with what is perhaps the key issue in climate change technology – technology deployment. Creating a market for technologies that could limit climate change – especially, creating a market soon enough that the action can make a real difference – will require government policy, whether that be tax incentives, regulations or some other measures. Simply undertaking research and development (R&D) is not enough, to put it mildly.

This is one reason I am extremely skeptical of proposals to address our energy problems through some new analog of DARPA (or Apollo or the Manhattan Project). In all of those cases, the federal government was the sole or primary market for the product being developed. No market needed to be created, and price was relatively inconsequential. This is the exact opposite of the situation that confronts us with energy technology, which is to say, climate change technology.

Moreover, the DARPA-like proposals, in general, have not been backed by any clear analysis of where gaps exist even in the R&D portion of the product “pipeline.” Do we have insufficient basic research or applied research or product development? Is the problem lack of funding at the beginning of the product cycle or at the end? What specifically would a new agency do differently than the Department of Energy's existing programs? Is there some area we would shift money away from to free up funds for the new DARPA?

Because so many questions remain to be answered, the Science Committee has reported out a bill, H.R. 5656, that includes a provision asking the National Academy of Sciences to take a closer look at its own DARPA-like proposal, known as ARPA-E.

I am not suggesting that we ought to be satisfied with the status quo in energy R&D. At the very least, more funding is needed. But I am suggesting that we not rush into embracing an idea that is more “buzzword” than solution at this point. And I am urging that before Congress consumes time reorganizing the fairly successful federal research bureaucracy, that we turn our attention to the more essential and difficult quest for policy tools that will help get whatever technology is created into the marketplace.

I hope these thoughts are helpful. I look forward to continuing to work with all of you on these important questions.